

April Cover

Dear Diary,

Tonight, I'm worried about my town.

There is so much division right now and so much finger-pointing about who did what, who spent what, which board made which decision and who should have known better. I understand wanting answers, I want those things too. But at some point, we have to recognize that we are where we are today. We can learn from the past without spending all of our energy fighting about it, because pointing fingers isn't going to fix tomorrow.

I wish I could fix all of this overnight. I really do. I wish there were one easy answer that could protect our police and fire departments, properly fund our schools, maintain our roads, support our employees and protect taxpayers at the same time. But there isn't. Sometimes the only way I can describe these last several months is that I feel like I was dropped straight into the middle of a dumpster fire and haven't been able to come up for oxygen since. I came onto the Select Board wanting to serve my community, ask questions, bring new ideas to the table and help make things better. Instead, every time it feels like we're getting our arms around one problem, another one appears. I've spent countless hours reading budgets, researching, asking questions and trying to understand not only how we got here, but how we get out of it.

The Select Board sitting here today didn't create decades of financial decisions, contracts, rising costs or the current school funding situation. Our department heads didn't create all of it either. But every one of us has a responsibility to be part of the solution now. Department heads need to look for efficiencies. The Select Board needs to continue asking difficult questions. We need better long-term planning, we need to examine spending, and we have to be willing to change the way we've always done business. There isn't going to be one person, one department or one decision that fixes everything.

I also think it's important to put our property taxes into perspective. Templeton's FY2026 tax rate is \$11.87 per \$1,000 of assessed value, and it has actually declined from \$16.11 in FY2021. (Templeton⁽⁰⁰⁰⁾) I know a tax rate alone doesn't tell the entire story because property values matter too, and I would never minimize what any family is paying. But I also think it's fair to acknowledge that we've worked to maintain a relatively low tax rate while still expecting the town to provide the same essential services residents depend on. According to the town's own override information, the proposed increase is estimated at about \$1.16 on the tax rate, which would put it around \$13.03 using FY2026 figures. (Templeton⁽⁰⁰⁰⁾)

The school budget is a huge piece of our financial reality, and state funding matters. That's why I've continued reaching out and advocating for Templeton at the state level. We need the state to understand what communities like ours are facing, but while we continue fighting for better funding, we still have to deal responsibly with the numbers sitting in front of us today.

I understand why people say, "Just use stabilization." It sounds easy because the money is sitting there. But that's one-time money, and salaries and operating expenses come back every single year. Once those reserves are spent, they're gone, but the bills aren't. We also have to think about the town's overall financial health, our ability to borrow affordably and what happens if we continue kicking the can down the road. I don't want Templeton's finances deteriorating to a point where extraordinary outside state financial oversight ever becomes necessary. I want the people who live here to continue having a meaningful voice in the decisions about their community.

But when I strip away the budgets, meetings and politics, this becomes very personal for me.

I've needed public safety. I've received those awful phone calls telling me someone I love has been in an accident. A couple of years ago, I woke up and watched my security cameras from the night before and saw masked men trying to get into my garage while my family and I were sleeping. I still wonder whether they'll come back and try again. Right next door are my elderly in-laws, whom I help care for, and I know how quickly an ordinary day can become a medical emergency.

Those things matter when my family sits down and talks about this decision. When I think about someone trying to get into our property while we're sleeping, I think about having police officers available. When I look next door at my in-laws, I think

about firefighters and EMTs being available when seconds matter. When I think about my husband, my children and everyone I love, I think about what happens on the worst day of our lives when we pick up the phone and ask for help. For my family, that weighs heavily. That's why my family and I will be voting YES on the override.

That's our decision. Every household has its own finances, circumstances and priorities, and every voter has to make that decision for themselves.

Regardless of what happens, the work doesn't stop after the vote. We still need better planning. We still need efficiencies. We still need to ask difficult questions and change the way we do business where change is needed. And we need to continue advocating for more support from the state.

Most importantly, I hope we stop tearing each other apart.

When the votes are counted, we're still going to see each other at the store, at school events, at Town Meeting and around town. We're still neighbors. Some of us will vote yes and some will vote no, but none of that changes the fact that we all have to live here together afterward.

This is our town. We can keep pointing fingers at how we got here, or we can regroup, refocus and figure out how we're going to move Templeton forward together.